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C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

12 September 1962

DRAFT

MEMORANDUM FOR THE ACTING DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Implications of the Soviet Warning on Cuba

1. The Soviet statement of 11 September concerning Cuba does not significantly alter the nature of the USSR's commitment to defend the Castro regime. The Soviets have once again used deliberately vague and ambiguous language to avoid a clear cut obligation of military support for Cuba in the event of an American invasion. Nevertheless, they appear to have taken a long step in this statement toward staking the prestige of the USSR on the Bloc's ability to ensure the survival of the Cuban Government.

The Soviet Warning

2. We do not believe that by virtue of its latest statement the USSR has specifically committed itself to Cuba's defense or has more firmly bound itself in this regard than in previous threats on Castro's behalf. The statement is cast in general terms and carefully refrains from spelling out precise Soviet

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intentions in the event of an attack on Cuba. As before, however, the Soviets attempt to create the impression that in these circumstances the full might of the USSR's nuclear and missile power would be brought into play. At the same time, the statement paradoxically implies that the Bloc could retaliate against the US by using its forces against the West in other areas of the world, a threat which, as rendered, presupposes conditions short of general war.

Soviet Motives

3. This statement, together with the rapid military build-up in Cuba since July, clearly reflects both Cuban and Soviet concern over the possibility of a US effort to overthrow the Castro regime. We cannot exclude the possibility that the Soviets believe that an invasion of Cuba is imminent, or that the US is preparing to interdict Soviet supplies to Cuba. It is unlikely, however, that the Soviets believe that a new warning in itself, would intimidate the US and it is also unlikely that they would make a public issue out of their obligations to Castro on the eve of a US invasion (in contrast to their warnings of 1961 which came after the Soviets had concluded the invasion had failed.)

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We believe, rather, that the Soviets embarked on the military build up in Cuba and issued the 11 September statement largely in order to impress the US with the heightened costs and risks involved in direct moves against Cuba. Thus, we think they were seeking to influence US policy, rather than hoping to forestall imminent US action.*

4. To this end, the statement seeks to arouse worldwide concern that US "aggression" against Cuba could lead to a general war. It probably foreshadows a strenuous effort in the UN to place the US on the defensive and inhibit US freedom of action. The Soviets are seeking to build a strong case against the US by emphasizing that the nature of their assistance to Cuba is "designed exclusively for defensive purposes." Moreover, the statement undercuts speculation of a permanent Soviet military establishment in Cuba by explicitly denying that the USSR has any need "to shift its weapons for a repulsion of aggression, for a retaliatory blow to any other country -- like Cuba."

* The Soviets realize, of course (and this may be a motive involved in the threats), that if no invasion in fact materializes, they can then claim full credit for deterring the US.

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5. The Soviets may have been caught off guard by the extent of US reaction to the new arms buildup in Cuba. The statement displays great sensitivity to the implications of the President's request for authorization to call up reserves. The Soviets probably felt that they had no choice but to respond with a strong statement of their support for Castro and their right to provide Cuba with military assistance. Nevertheless, the statement seems intended in part to check growing tension over Cuba by implying that the Soviets do not intend to go beyond certain kinds of weapons for Cuba. Moreover, the statement also may have been intended to provide an assurance that the USSR does not intend a simultaneous challenge to US prestige in both the Cuban and Berlin situations.

6. The belligerent tone on Cuba contrasts with the announcement of a "pause" in Berlin negotiations because the US finds it "difficult" to negotiate in an election period. It is conceivable that growing tensions over Cuba, particularly the US decision to seek authorization for a call-up of reserves, has influenced Soviet plans for Berlin. As this statement confirms, the Soviets have apparently concluded that no progress can be made by merely continuing to negotiate. They may have also concluded, however, that the political climate in the US had substantially

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further
raised the risk that forward action on Berlin would meet with a
vigorous US response. Thus the Soviets appear to have deferred
any major showdown over Berlin, while leaving open the possibility
that such a decision could be influenced by developments in the
Cuban situation.

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